CHAPTER VII

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

"ARE children gods or kings that older people should tremble over them?" was the way one village woman reacted to what she considered the newfangled ideas of child rearing taught by the village doctor. Another woman said to me, "Why should so much be made of children when there is no sense of their living in such a heavy life?"

These attitudes reflected themselves in the statistics of infant mortality, which were given in Chapter II but deserve repetition. Back in 1926 one out of every five babies born alive died during its first year; this figure had fallen to one out of every eight in 1941, but was still much higher than the United States rate of one out of twenty-two. But the birth rate too has been falling. When I first went to Bulgaria in 1929 I found village after village where 45 babies were born annually for every thousand people. This number has fallen to around 30 for Dragalevtsy and 21 for Bulgaria as a whole. The United States rate was about 23 in 1946.

Childhood was a period to live through, not especially to enjoy. Bulgarian peasants, if they ever had given thought to it, would probably have agreed with the results of some of the American studies which suggested that childhood was not necessarily the happiest time of life. In Dragalevtsy it was, in fact, the period of greatest uncertainty and insecurity. The Dragalevtsy child early learned the basic principle of action: if you want to stay out of trouble, keep out of the grown-ups' way. The child's greatest errors were those of commission rather than omission.

"Children are the wealth of the poor. They are for God and for the peasants and so why should we worry about special care for them?" said one woman who realized that the townspeople had smaller families in spite of greater comforts. Her statement also showed how her

work of Vrbanic, who goes back to the census of 1888.

S.P. B. 163 [162] He[1] presents the following results:

Among the Bulgars the number of men is 1,000 for every 965 women; the males show an excess of births of 54.2%; the ratio between single persons to married persons is for men, 53%; for women 41.9% (4.4% widowers). The birth rate is 36.36 per 1,000; it is below that of the Serbs; on the contrary, the death rate is less than among these, only 18. (compare the figures given above in Section 31). In Bulgaria very few infants die during the first year. They have the lowest infant mortality of any among the South-Slavs /203/ (8.3% only, against 15.4% in Dalmatia, 16.3% in Serbia, 21.2% in Croatia). As a result of this peculiarity, the coefficient of the excess of births over deaths is, if Jirecek is to be believed, as favorable as in Serbia, it represents 1.83. For the years 1881-1887, Sarafov found an increase of 1.85 (during this period there were born 100 boys for 89.7 girls); for the period 1890-1900, the coefficient was, it seems, slightly less. More recently, Iurkevich suggested the figure of 1.5 for the north of Bulgaria and of 1.2 for the south.

S.P. B. 161 According to Popov, the population density is 38.8 inhabitants per square kilometer.

S.P. B. 795 From the religious viewpoint the Bulgars belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church. They have a church of their own whose head, called The Exarch, lives at Orta-koi (now Ivailovgrad) near Constantinople. Along with the Orthodox majority, one finds two dissident groups. The first of these is the Catholic Bulgars, or Paulitians (Pavlikiani). They speak the eastern dialect and live in the districts of Nikopol, of Svishtov, in seven villages in the outskirts of Plovdiv (Philippopolis). There is also a Catholic community at Berdavski Geran, near Byala Slatina, and another, that of Gostilia, near Oryakhovo (district of Vratsa). All of them originated in the region of Plovdiv or Philippopolis, which was formerly their center. They formerly composed a whole series of communities between Plovdiv and /204/ Nikopol. It is from these that there came the colonies of Bulgars who settled in Hungary (Vinga, Besenov), and who are Catholics.

S.P. B. 795 101 Another rather sizeable section is composed of the Bulgars who, under Turkish domination, embraced Islam. They are called Pomaks.

[1] [i.e. Vrbanic, op. cit. 116, p. 125--Analyst]